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THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

OR

THE WORTH OF BEAUTY

By CHARLES H. FARNSWORTH

WE all know the old story, how the gods while feasting had the apple of discord with its inscription, "to the most beautiful," thrown among them and how with an unusual exhibition of wisdom they decided not to settle the vexed point themselves, but to refer it to an independent judge and how the unknown heir of Priam, feeding his flocks on the slopes of Mount Ida, was chosen to decide which of the goddesses was most fair. The interesting part of this story is, shall I say, the graft that the fair goddesses offered to win the coveted judgment. One came with wealth and power, another, glorious in dignity, with honor and wisdom, and the third, with a thought to the last curl, embodying what she would give, promised Paris the most beautiful woman.

Women could not have been rare on the slopes of Mount Ida. It was not the woman that was the attraction, but the fact that this was to be the most beautiful woman.

Stopping to consider these offerings we find that they can be classified in two distinct groups. First, Hera and Athena, presenting power and wisdom, have this characteristic in what they offer that the value of what they give is dependent upon what we can do with it. It is because power and wisdom lead to certain results that we desire them.

On the other hand, the value of what Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, offers is not dependent on what is done with the gift, but the value is inherent in the gift itself. In one, happiness is in the promise, in the other, in the state itself. That the Greek youth should have chosen the latter is not strange, but I wonder if today one of our college graduates, on the sylvan slopes of Mt. Washington, should have the choice between beauty, power and wisdom offered to him, would he choose as did Paris? He might if he responded to his heart's desire, but would not the prudence of the times, the experience of those about him, make him pause? In fact the whole weight of his education, the advice of his elders and the councils of religion would be against the choice of beauty.

Can it be that the centuries that have followed the famous choice have shown mankind that it was deceived and that it would have been better had Paris chosen wealth, or power, or glory? Certainly the races of the twentieth century are showing their devotion to power and wealth and a disregard of the demands of beauty that would seem to reverse the judgment of Paris. Yet it hardly seems as if the human heart could have changed so much. The difference between the estimate of the Greek and that of the modern is the difference between the externals of civilization, in the forms of education and creed, rather than any change in the nature of human beings. If this is so, an inquiry into the causes that have led to this change will be of timely interest.

One of the most important of these causes is the two totally different ways by which we determine values. The typical expression of practical value is money. Its worth is in what it can be changed for; its value is in ultimate results; its pleasure-satisfaction is anticipatory. Sagacity, keenness, and above all an intense consciousness of self that gives worth to every thing in the degree of its separate possession are the personal qualities that distinguish practical values.

The typical expression of aesthetic value, on the contrary, is love. Its worth is what it is, rather than what it can be changed for; its value is immediate; its pleasure-satisfaction is not anticipatory. Trust, faith and above all an ability to forget self in what is contemplated, a sense of worth coming from a feeling of union with a universal beauty, are the personal qualities that distinguish æsthetic values.

One is the practical, amenable to measurement and can be stated in terms of what is done. The other is the æsthetic, not measurable and is not stated in terms of doing, but of being. We give reasons for the first value and simply affirmations for the second.

It is no more than natural in a time of materialistic development, when the causal explanation of nature's procedure has had such unparalleled development, that there should be a tendency to overestimate those standards of value that are measured and underestimate those that are simply felt. For instance, the value of power, or wealth, or martial success can be stated in terms of what results in consequence of their possession. But in what kind of a scale would one measure the worth of beauty? And yet the attempt to give it some purposeful end is universal. Hence, we are told that the value of beauty is in the pleasure that it gives, while the acquirement of pleasure is the goal which we all desire,

both our intelligence and our moral nature rebel against making mere pleasure the end in any great pursuit. However ardently we desire it, we wish it as an accompaniment of worthy deeds rather than an end in itself. To say that the value of beauty is in the direct pleasure that it gives is to damage its worth at the outset.

But if it can be shown that the pleasure that accompanies æsthetic activity is no stronger, more unique or more universal than the pleasure that arises from practical activity, then it will be necessary to find a reason other than that afforded by pleasure gained or expected to value rightly the judgment of Paris.

To illustrate, let us imagine four men—a practical man of affairs, a scientist, a devout religious man and an artist—standing in the presence of a thundering Niagara. The practical man's thought would soon pass to the immense power manifested. His mind would see the value of that power in relation to the industries of the country. The problem of how to utilize it would come up, the necessity for capital, for investigations in order to make an attractive presentation of the business proposition. Need for getting options on the land, so that rights might not be claimed by others before he was ready to act, the magnitude of what was before him, the possibility of turning that roaring torrent into a stream of gold, would excite him so that his heart would beat faster and he would be impatient to act. He would take steps to accomplish his ends; his excitement would hardly allow him to sleep or eat.

The scientist sees the same torrent, but he notices the gorge. Stenciled on its rocky ribs he sees the story of the past. He sees again the mighty forces that lifted the underlying rock and pushed back the waters, until rising over the crusty rim they have cut back the chasm before him. His mind is attracted by the birds he sees, rare specimens flying in the rainbow and mist. He observes the unusual flowers that nod over the edges at his feet. His heart beats faster, too. Here in the picture of the rocks he sees a theory of creation that puzzles his mind. That bird fills a gap in the series of evolutionary forms. This flower is a specimen he has long sought. He is filled with a desire to do. Already he is classifying, arranging, placing before his colleagues and the public the evidences that he has discovered.

Clothed in his priestly garb, the religious man also gazes on the same torrent. To him that roar is the voice of God. It was the arm of Jehovah that cleft the chasm before him. The song of the bird, the beauty of the flowers and the glistening rainbow are all promises of a divine love manifesting this beauty for him,

the chosen follower. His heart also is filled with excitement, finding its expression in devotion and prayer.

Finally, the artist beholds the same sight. To him the fall does not suggest stocks, organizations, buildings; not discoveries, scientific theories, or specimens; not religious dogma, worship or a proprietary God; in fact the whole attitude is different. What he sees does not lead back to himself, what he is to do, but the self is lost in the glorious sight before him. His only desire is to grasp it. He climbs out on a pinnacle adequately to group the perpendicular shadows that close in on the floating mists of shimmering light. The black outline of pine trees must bound the view. That glistening rainbow must focus all the radiant color about it in the center of vision. He is wrapped in awe, spellbound he seeks no further. He rests.

The sight for the first three led directly away from what was being observed to other acts and consequences, becoming a link in the chain of cause and effect, while what the artist beheld, instead of leading away, focused his attention on what was before him, isolating it from the outside world. The value to him of those rapt moments was that in them the heart found rest from the spectre of consequences. Past and future were lost in the infinite now. Not struggle, but attainment, filled the soul with heavenly beatitude.

Comparing what the gorge offered to the four who saw it with what the goddesses promised the shepherd judge, we find the same parallelism: on the one side, wealth, power, advantages, each leading to another; on the other side, all future advantages forgotten in the beauty of the moment.

Evidently we have two standards of value in the illustration of the three men and the artist. The value of the experience of the first can be stated in terms of what follows: the practical man in manufacturing and business opportunities that are opened up; the scientific man in his specimens and discoveries; the religious man in his confirmation of belief in the goodness and greatness of his God; but no such measurement can be applied to the product of the artist's experience. The experience itself, or the state that he is in, is its own justification.

Unfortunately we do not ordinarily differentiate between these two standards, but apply the practical standard, that measures by effects, to the aesthetic experience. The result is the common verdict that the value of beauty is in the pleasure awakened. This is to totally misjudge the true nature of the æsthetic attitude, which is an ultimate state of being in which all desire

leading away from itself ceases. This cannot be measured by any consequence, even the pleasure that accompanies it.

In everyday life we constantly value experience by these two different standards. We look at a sunset, notice how red it is, and say: "It will be pleasant tomorrow." Our thought goes right on to what we wish to do. We observe the sunset closer, see how the clouds are drifting, notice the direction of the wind. This the practical attitude. We may now turn and notice the sunset for beauty; the rich harmony in those dull reds turning to a deep orange, where the King of Day has just disappeared behind the clouds. We notice the forms of the hills below, how on either side they frame the picture. This is the aesthetic point of view. It has no connection with what we are going to do or have done. In fact, the most fascinating thing is, that we have forgotten ourselves. We are freed.

Or take an etching of London Bridge. In the distance is the dome of St. Paul, some black arches in the foreground, and blotched to the right some kind of a floating craft, everything enwrapped in clouds and mists. We look at it spellbound. It creates in us a mood but it tells us nothing.

On the table in front of me is a Baedeker map of London. Here every line and mark mean something, but in a totally different way from what was meant by the picture, for while in the picture the lines and marks merely suggested objects sufficiently to awaken a mood, in the map every line refers to something in brick and mortar, street and park. It is absurd to say we only valued the sunset when by it we could prognosticate the weather, or that the map was prized rather than the picture because we could measure on its surfaces the directions and distances of our going. True the map has its value and the wise person will look at the sunset to judge the weather, but we do prize pictures and who would forego the joy of the passing day.

Both kinds of value are real, but the worth of the one cannot be judged by the standard of the other.

Parallel with this tendency to attribute the value of the aesthetic to the pleasure that attends it, is the complementary tendency to put the worth of art on its forms as naturally being the cause of the pleasure. It is against this notion that music bears such remarkable testimony. Whether we compare our musical experience with that of the past, the present, or the possible future, we must admit that the remarkable similarity of statement with reference to the power and influence of music in contrast with such totally different musical forms employed, shows that

it is in the æsthetic state awakened and not in the forms that give it rise, that its value consists. For instance, comparing past with present, how enthusiastically have the Greeks written of their music. What wonderful power they have attributed to its influence. How ardently did the churchmen of the dark ages cultivate singing and what significance they placed on its influence as a factor in spiritual control. Yet how inadequate by our standards were the forms of music that Plato and Charlemagne so highly prized. At the same time, the value these worthies placed on their art was not the enthusiasm of ignorance, of experimenters looking forward to an ideal. Their estimate was placed on proved facts of experience. Evidently the Greek Ode, or the Gregorian Service, moved the sensitive souls of their time as profoundly as do a Schubert Song, or a Beethoven Symphony the similiar spirits of our own.

No one, certainly, would have the temerity to say that sensitiveness to the influence of music had kept pace with the formal expressive development of the art. In fact, some observers claim that the appreciation of music diminishes with civilization. Whether this is so or not, the unanimity in the testimony as to the influence of music seems to have little relation to the widely varying types of music employed.

Comparing now people of the same time, but of widely varying civilization: We admit the artistic ability of the Japanese, Chinese and Hindu in every branch of art, granting even superiority in many of them, and then at the same time we call their music barbarous, because it is unlike our own. This is strong testimony to the fact that the significance in the æsthetic state is not in the forms employed but in the activity of the soul.

Similarity in the formal standards in so many of the arts, such as architecture, sculpture, painting and decoration, is due to the accident that the forms these arts employ are physical necessities of people in every part of the world. In other words, if these arts created their forms solely for the æsthetic purpose, so unique in the art of tone, the product of oriental taste in these respects would seem as barbarous to us as it does in the case of music. But the argument for the significance of the æsthetic state can be made stronger still if we take the established art of the present day and by its standards attempt to value the art of the futurist in music, for now we can compare not only the product of essentially the same time, but also the same civilization. Here also we discover that widely different forms are employed for producing a similar state of being. It is the spirit in art as in all things that

maketh alive. And if the creators of the music of the future sincerely realize the æsthetic significance of their work, they need not worry for recognition, for the influences in the racial progress that have produced their works will produce the public to understand them.

What is causing the confusion in our musical judgment whether of the past, the present, or the future, is the application of the practical standard to a state of being to which it does not apply.

To sum up such application: we call pleasure the end in beauty and then associate the beauty with some specific form or manifestation that has awakened the feeling in us, and then every one who is not moved by similar forms we pronounce as deficient in musical perception. What colossal egotism, unthinkable but for the twist in our judgment that comes from the confusion of standards!

No argument is necessary to show the value of the practical attitude. We should soon come to grief as did the gods and men in the classic story, were we not to consider the consequences of what we experienced. The practical results of our scientific advance have tended to make us more and more capable of determining and measuring the beneficial or harmful consequences of our acts. The prudential capacity of the race has infinitely developed since the days when gods and men held charming converse. On the other hand, the value of the æsthetic attitude is in this very power of detachment from the consequences of things about us, in the possibility it gives of being able to forget the egoistic self with all its passions and possessions and realize an altruistic self in harmony with the universe. Such harmony is the very breath of the soul and has ever been sought since man first caught sight of himself as different from the brute. It was this insight that made the eventful choice of our story so important. For the Greek and his civilization has stood as an example of the value of the æsthetic. Never was there a time when the world needed more to heed the lesson. Power to possess has obsessed us. Even the "brooding East" is forced out of her contemplation. Where will it end unless man learns to value being as the equal of doing, and to regard the satisfaction of the soul as seriously as that of the body. This can be done only when we keep clear the two standards of value and learn that the one cannot be judged in terms of the other. Thus shall we realize the true worth of beauty.

Let us prize the practical, our material progress depends upon it. Let us also have the courage to estimate life by æsthetic standards and gladly forego the strife for possession in order to win the peace of realization, the outward token of which is so beautifully illustrated by the judgment of Paris.